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SUBJECT: NGOS DISCUSS ASSISTANCE AND SECURITY IN SWAT

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (C) Summary: In September 4 discussions, representatives from 14 international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) confirmed that humanitarian relief was being delivered in Swat despite insecurity and substantial challenges. The army has control of main population centers and main roads, but it continues to battle significant pockets of active Taliban resistance. The group noted persistent though unsubstantiated reports of extra-judicial killings, but noted the local culture of revenge and did not attribute them to the military. Participants emphasized the need for flexible long-term engagement to build trust with a community unused to a foreign aid presence. Most of the Taliban presence is local, prompting concern that ongoing conflicts with local law enforcement are likely to perpetuate local family feuds and violence. So far no international humanitarian assistance providers have had access to areas north of Mingora where NGOs fear the worst destruction has occurred. The UNHCR Acting Representative advocated investing in peace-keeping skills and redeploying Pakistani UN peace-keepers at home in conflict-affected areas. NGOs spoke highly of the role of provincial assistance authorities and of the army's treatment of civilians but said that local and party politics sometimes hindered assistance delivery. ICRC said it was encountering political objections to the neutrality of its assistance, and UNHCR said the government was in denial of the continuing emergency and reluctant to have humanitarian eyes and ears focused on protection issues. The humanitarian assistance providers understood the need for visibility of U.S. assistance but highlighted security risks of branding and the need to build government capacity. They outlined both long and short-term assistance priorities. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On September 4, the Ambassador held an iftar and round-table discussion at the Residence with INGOs, UNHCR and ICRC to discuss security and assistance issues in areas of displaced return. Participating NGOs included Concern, Oxfam UK, ACTED, Merlin, Mercy Corps, International Medical Corps, World Vision, International Relief and Development, Save the Children U.S., International Catholic Migration Commission, Relief International, Islamic Relief, Catholic Relief Services and the International Rescue Committee.

Coping with Insecurity in Swat: Be Flexible, Build Trust

13. (C) NGOs are providing humanitarian assistance and early recovery help in Swat despite an uncertain and unpredictable security situation. The key to implementing programs in Swat, said several, is being flexible and gaining access gradually by building trust. The army has focused on control of the major populations centers and roads, but there is no consistent army presence off the main road. Pockets of resistance where the Taliban are still present and active remain across the region. "One day everything is fine, but the next day something has happened," commented one NGO representative.

14. (SBU) Access in general is difficult for external actors, and there is no international humanitarian access north of Mingora where NGOs suspect there is extensive destruction and the need may be the greatest. There is widespread initial mistrust of NGOs in the Swat communities, and one NGO worried about the safety of its beneficiaries. Now in Swat for a year, ICRC fears that the rush of humanitarian actors into Swat will lead to a security incident which will affect the safety of all.

15. (C) UNHCR noted that, with the exception of the purely humanitarian role played by ICRC, "our making people happy is making the Taliban unhappy." An NGO added that reconstruction projects will be safe where militants are local and have a vested interest in the project, perhaps a school for their children, but if militants are outsiders (even from a neighboring area), then reconstruction projects

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would make good targets for the Taliban.

16. (C) ICRC stressed that the conflict was not over but was moving from frontline confrontation to asymmetric warfare with guerilla tactics. The NGOs have heard persistent but unsubstantiated reports of extra-judicial killings but noted the culture of revenge in the area and did not attribute these deaths to the military. One NGO had visited two villages where a week or two later 14 and 17 people were killed respectively. Another noted allegations of frequent desecration of bodies.

17. (SBU) UNHCR stressed the need to invest in the training of security forces to handle the current situation in insecure areas of return. Noting that Pakistan is the largest force contributor to UN peace-keeping operations, he advocated investing in peace-keeping skills and training returned peace-keepers for this task. He commented that the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, when visiting Pakistan, had emphasized to UNHCR Islamabad the need to work with the army and law enforcement in the interest of humanitarian assistance. Others noted that law enforcement was poorly equipped.

The Local Boys of the Taliban

18. (C) According to the NGOs, the police have returned to Mingora, but elsewhere the army continues to be engaged in missions to eliminate continued pockets of insurgency. NGOs have heard that those Taliban returning to Swat are being identified by local people and then picked up by the security forces.

19. (C) NGOs agreed that almost every family was connected to the Taliban one way or another. Often young boys, most from poor families, joined the Taliban for the economic opportunity or promises of glory. "They pay more in cash for work than we do," said one NGO representative who had met young, scared boys in a reeducation camp for the Taliban. An Islamic NGO stressed the need to provide an alternative to extremist madrassas because most people in the area want

their children to study the Koran, and the poor turn to madrassas because they provide room and board. UNHCR commented that the fact that local boys (militants) are fighting against other local boys (lashkars and police) is likely to produce family feuds and associated killings for years to come. The discussion touched on the possible role for reconciliation committees.

The Role of the Government and Politics

¶10. (C) One NGO commented that personnel in the Northwest Frontier Province's Emergency Relief Unit (ERU) and in the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) were "good, smart, and willing to push," and said the provincial government and DCOs did a good job of identifying needs. Another found the army to be professional in its dealings with civilians. However, provincial politics was seen to play an unhelpful role. It was alleged that under the Awami National Party (ANP)-led provincial authority, "IDP registration is not happening in Lower Dir because it is a PPP (Pakistan People's Party) stronghold." Similarly Swat aid from the ANP was reportedly being blocked by the PPP. One NGO distributing cash vouchers in Buner said political jockeying made it difficult to work at the local level as well; three local politicians had tried to draw the NGO to their respective villages to distribute vouchers to their specific lists of potential recipients.

¶11. (C) NGOs said people saw the federal government as not responding directly to humanitarian needs although some participants commented that the problem of a non-responsive social services system predated the conflict. NGOs noted the challenge of delivering relief through the district government while transitioning to longer-term development. They saw opportunities in the fact that the Government

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doesn't want to fail the people in NWFP and in the fact that the GOP and the humanitarian community share a common objective of sustainable return.

¶12. (C) UNHCR views the GOP as "in denial" in its belief that the emergency is over and that all attention can now be directed to reconstruction. According to UNHCR, the Government, which before saw the humanitarian community as essential, now sees it as "too many eyes and ears" raising issues about killings, registration and protection. ICRC added that it currently faces access issues in Swat, not for reasons of security but rather for political reasons, because it "won't budge on the neutrality of humanitarian work." ICRC decried the distinction being made by the Government between good victims (those whose suffering is seen as serving national duty and paying the price) and bad victims (family members of Taliban).

To Brand or Not to Brand

¶13. (C) The NGOs realized the complexity of the issue of branding and the reasons for wanting visibility of U.S. assistance. All saw branding as a security risk, however, and noted a low profile protects both NGO workers and beneficiaries. One participant commented on the necessity of additional local confidence-building if foreign funding of assistance becomes evident. Another stressed the importance of contextual risk analysis, and yet another commented that, unlike after the earthquake, people may become dissatisfied with the humanitarian community because "we are lined up with the police and the army." ICRC added that absence of branding makes all humanitarian assistance providers (except ICRC) alike: all are strongly branded by being accompanied by the military and the police.

Humanitarian Assistance Needs and Priorities

¶14. (SBU) The NGOs saw both short- and long-term assistance priorities. Some stressed the importance of quick impact projects to generate income and restore important infrastructure that was either damaged in conflict or historically poor. Highlighted needs included electricity generation and water pumps outside of Mingora, seeds to prevent further lost crops, and reconstruction of schools and the government offices required to restore governance. One participant pointed to the importance of investing long-term in agriculture and tourism. Another mentioned vocational training, such as in construction, to help rebuilding and generate income. All noted that needs vary greatly from village to village and among returnees, those who stayed behind in the conflict areas, and the secondarily displaced. NGOs saw opportunities and scope for development once people acclimatize to the NGOs. UNHCR said the security breakdown in Malakand Division, at a time when the attention had been on FATA, should teach a lesson about the importance of proactive attention to other sensitive areas across Pakistan.
PATTERSON